

THE COINS AND IDENTITY
OF THE NAMELESS YUEZHI KING OF BACTRIA*

Ever since the discovery of coins, which gave only the titles Basileus Basileuon Soter Megas, and not the personal name of the king, historians and numismatists alike have been puzzled about the identity of the issuer and contextualising his career and coinage¹. We are still asking the questions Whitehead had asked in 1914: "Are they to be reckoned a separate series issued anonymously by some king whose name is otherwise unknown to us, or are they the currency of a monarch whose name we know, possibly from other coins as well as from inscriptions?"². Some scholars have doubted even his individual existence. They have identified him with either Kujula Kadphises or Wima Kadphises. Among those who grant his individuality many deny his independent status and consider him as only a Viceroy or Vassal issuing coins in behalf of his suzerain, namely Wima Kadphises. And among those who accept his

* First draft of this paper was written more than twelve years ago for inclusion in my work on the Yuezhi-Kushans which remains unfinished. Hopefully a revised and more comprehensive version of it will be done in due course. In the mean while I will welcome criticism.

¹ For early discoveries and reports see C. MASSON, "Memoir on the Ancient Coins found at Begram in the Kohistan of Kabul", in JASB 3 (1834), pp. 153-175, (1836), pp. 537-554; H. H. WILSON, *Ariana Antiqua*, London, 1841.

² R. B. WHITEHEAD, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore*, Vol. I; *The Indo-Greek Coins*, Oxford, 1914, p. 160.

independent status some regard him as a filler-of-the-gap ruler of uncertain origin and standing, while others would like to find a secure place for him in the Yuezhi-Kushan sequence³. We consider him the great founder of the Yuezhi state in Bactria. But we still do not know the name of this king, then we would therefore call him 'Nameless' (Anamaka in the Sanskrit), until his personal name is discovered⁴. We must add here that his coins are found in extraordinary abundance, and over a wide stretch of territory from beyond the Oxus in the North to beyond the Jamuna in the South. This fact should indicate a great power and a long reign. We should

³ For different views on the identity of the king, see A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Sakas or the Sacae-Scythians", in NC, 3rd Series 10 (1890), pp. 103-172, 344-45, 357, partic. pp. 114-17, A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Kushanas or Great Yueti", in NC, 3rd Series 12 (1892), pp. 40-88, 98-159, partic. p. 71, E. J. RAPSON, *Indian Coins*. Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde, Strassburg, 1898, pp. 16f., 1913: 662-64; R. B. WHITEHEAD, *op. cit.*, p. 100 fn.2; S. KONOW, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*. Vol. II. pt. 1. *Kharoshthi Inscriptions*, Calcutta, 1929, p. lxi (a viceroy of Wima Kadphises); R. GHIRSHMAN, *Begram*, MDFA, vol. XII, Cairo, 1946, p. 134 (a vassal of Wima); J. E. van LOHUIZEN DE LEEUW, *The "Scythian" Period*, Leiden, 1949, p. 375 (undecided but inclined to support Konow); M. E. MASSON, "Proizchozhdenie bezymennogo "Carya carej-velikago Spasitleja", in *Trudy Sredneaziatskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, NS 11/3 (1950), pp. 11-49 (with Kujula Kadphises); J. H. MARSHALL, *Taxila*, 3 Vols., Cambridge, 1951, pp. 68-9 (viceroy appointed by Wima but may have belonged to the earlier Pahlava ruling family); A. K. NARAIN, "The date of Kaniska" in PDK, 1968 (1960), pp. 210-11 (with Kujula); B. N. PURI, *India under the Kushanas*, Bombay, 1965, p. 24 (viceroy of Wima); D. W. MACDOWALL, "Soter Megas, the King of Kings, the Kushana", in JNSI. 30 (1968), pp. 28-48 (places him between Kujula and Wima); B. N. MUKHERJEE, *Studies in Kushan Geneology and Chronology*, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 53-55 (equates with Wima); BHASKAR CHATTOPADHYAYA, *The Age of the Kushanas- A Numismatic Study*, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 49-55 (Wima's viceroy); B. Ya. STAVISKY, *Kushanskaya Baktriya, Problemy istorii i kul'tury* [Bactria in the Kushan age. Problems of History and Culture (in Russian)], Moscow, 1977, p. 23; G. A. PUGACHENKOVA, "K discussii o "Soter Megase"" [On the discussion of Soter Megas], in Tashkent, Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, *Trudy*, 295 (1966), pp. 15-25; M. MITCHNER, *The Early Coinage of Central Asia*, London, 1973, pp. 55-65, Pls. xii-xiv (successor of Sapadbeizes-Heraios issues); B. KUMAR, *The Early Kusanas*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 43 (governor appointed by Wima); J. M. ROSENFELD, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, p. 18 (before Wima).

⁴ The one and the only written source about the first Yuezhi king of Bactria (Daxia) is the Chinese but unfortunately it does not provide the name.

look for him amongst the most important of the kings known to us. It appears improbable that such a great potentate with such grandiloquent titles would be so self-effacing, or would be content with being a viceroy or a governor.

Let us describe the coins first. All the known mintage of this Nameless king may be classified as below :

CATEGORY I: MONOLINGUAL

Type I⁵.

Obverse: Within dotted border a diademed, laureate and radiate bust of king to right, holding a filleted sceptre in r. hand. To left, behind head, a *Tamga* 𐰪

Reverse: Diademed and helmeted (?) king riding a horse to r., holding a whip (?). To r. a *Tamga*.

Legend in Greek: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΩΝ ΣΩΤΗΡ ΜΕΓΑΣ
(*Basileus Basileuon Soter Megas*)

Type 2⁶.

Obverse: Within a bead a reel border bust of king wearing a crested helmet to left, holding an object (?) in l. Hand.

To left 𐰪 to right a *Tamga*

Reverse: Diademed king on horse to r., holding an ankus or a whip (?) in outstretched r. hand.

To right a *Tamga*

Legend in Greek: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΩΝ ΣΩΤΗΡ ΜΕΓΑΣ
(*Basileus Basileuon Soter Megas*).

⁵ See P. GARDNER, *Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum*, London, 1966 (1986), p. 114, Pl. XXIV.2; R. B. WHITEHEAD, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-62, Pl. XVI.101; M. MITCHINER, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-65, Pl. XII. 102-107, XIII.134-139, XIV.147-156. This type exhibits both round and square forms of the Greek tetters. R. B. WHITEHEAD, *op. cit.*, p. 162, thought that "the bust may be intended for the representation of a deity. If it is the king there is little or no attempt at portraiture".

⁶ P. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 116, Pl. XXIV.6; he describes, "in r. hand, a lance" which seems incorrect; R. B. WHITEHEAD, *op. cit.*, p. 160, Pl. XVI. 94; M. MITCHINER, *op. cit.*, p. 58, Pl. XII.100. The latter two describe the object in l. hand as spear. There are specimens of this type, as the one illustrated by Whitehead, in which the monograms are absent from the obverse side.

Type 3⁷.

Obverse: Diademed bust of king to r.,

To right a *Tamga*

Reverse: Zeus standing to front, r. hand holding a thunderbolt and l. a long sceptre.

To left a monogram

Legend in corrupt Greek: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΩΝ ΣΩΤΗΡ Μ --
 ([Basileus] Basileon (or Basileuon) Soter M[egas])

CATEGORY II: BILINGUAL


Type 4⁸

Obverse: Diademed king on horse to r., holding an *ankus* or a whip (?) in r. hand.

To right tamga

Legend in Greek: --- ΩΝ ΣΩΤΗΡ ΜΕΑ -----
 ([Basileus Basile]on (or[Basileu]on) Soter Me[gas])

Reverse: Zeus standing to r. clad in himation with r. hand outstretched and l. holding a sceptre.

⁷ P. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 116, Pl. XXIV.5; he describes Zeus as holding in r. hand a thunderbolt over an altar, but the altar is not clear, it looks like a monogram. R. B. WHITEHEAD, *op. cit.*, p. 162-63, Pl. XVI.109; M. MITCHINER, *op. cit.*, p. 58, Pl. XII.101, he describes the bust "with hook at front" and the object below thunderbolt on rev. as a monogram 

⁸ P. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 114, Pl. XXIV. 1, the object to r. on the rev. is described as "uncertain" by Gardner but it is clearly a vase in the illustration. R. B. WHITEHEAD, *op. cit.*, p. 160, Pl. XVI. 96, he describes the object as flower-pot and plant; M. MITCHINER, *op. cit.*, p. 65, Pl. XIV.145. But in *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage in 9 Volumes*, esp. Vol. VIII, London, 1975-76 pp. 766-67, he classifies this type also as issues of Soter Megas Vasishka. Not everybody reads the additional letter *ra* at the end of the Kharoshthi legend. Whitehead had read it and noted that Rodgers thought that his Punjab Museum specimen "exhibited three extra letters, which must signify a name, an epithet or a monetary denomination". The word is slightly off the flan of the coin. After comparing the Punjab Museum coin with one in the British Museum, Whitehead considered the possibility of three extra letters between *tradarasa* and *maharajasa*. He thought the first letter was distinctly *ra* and third could be *la* R. B. WHITEHEAD, "Two Coins of Soter Megas", in *JRAS* (July 1913), pp. 660-61; R. B. WHITEHEAD, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore, Vol. I: The Indo-Greek Coins*, p. 161.

To 1. Kharoshthi letter, 𑖅 ;to r. vase with plant leaves, (*pūrṇakalaśa*).

Legend in Kharoshthi : *Maharajasa rajadirajasa mahatasa tratarasa ra....*

CATEGORY III: ANEPIGRAPHIC

Type 5⁹

Obverse: Within dotted border a nude male figure (Śiva ?) standing to front holding in r. hand, a sceptre or trident (?) ; lion-skin or drapery (?) on l. arm.

To 1. *Tamga* , to r. Kh. Letter, (vi).

Reverse: Within dotted border a draped figure of a female deity (Ardoksho ?), standing to r. holding a *cornucopiae*.

To 1. (*Nandipada* or *Triratna*)

To r. a vase or flower-pot with plant leaves (*pūrṇakalaśa*).

There are two more types attributed to this king. But they seem to be of dubious character and they are hardly mentioned in recent writings. One is the coin described by Cunningham¹⁰ as having a "Bust with two faces, surmounted by an Indo-Scythian helmet" on the obverse, and "king standing to r., sacrificing at small altar" on the reverse. The left face in the bust, on the obverse, is bearded with a symbol in front, and the right face is smooth with the symbol of the Nameless king in front. Cunningham notes that "this coin is unfortunately in very bad preservation. There are traces of legends

⁹ Ibid., p. 163, Pl.XV.1.113; D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, p. 32, he does not describe it; M. MITCHNER, *The Early Coinage of Central Asia*, p. 63, Pl.XIII.133, he describes the male deity on the obv. as Śiva-Hercules with trident and lion-skin. Whitehead describes the male figure as nude and holding a sceptre, and with drapery on l. arm. He also considers the Figure being possibly that of Śiva.

¹⁰ A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Kushanas or Great Yue-ti", p. 71, Pl. XV. 14. He calls the symbol in front of the bearded face as "Kadphises symbol" R. B. WHITEHEAD, "Two Coins of Soter Megas", p. 659, examined the coin in the British Museum and noted that it was in poor condition and "all that can be said with certainty about the symbol attributed to Soter Megas is that it has three prongs instead of four...." Whitehead did not include this even in his "unrepresented types" of Soter Megas in the Punjab Museum Catalogue (p. 163) but in the "unrepresented types" of Wima (p. 185).

on both sides, but I cannot recognise any single letter with certainty. On the king's side the traces look like Greek". This coin is in the British Museum and I have examined it. It looks like an ancient forgery or a cluttered overstruck piece and may not be related to the series of coinage issued by the Nameless king¹¹. The second type is the one listed as the sixth group by M. E. Masson¹² and which is of silver. This one has the bust of the king on the obverse with the Greek legend *Basileus Basileus Soter Megas* and Zeus seated on throne with the Kharoshthi legend *Maharajasa rajatirajasa mahatasa tratarasa* on the reverse. It is not clear whether the usual *Tamga* of the Nameless king is there. In the absence of this consistent feature it may be excluded from the coin series under discussion¹³:

The whole series is remarkably unified by the consistent use of a *Tamga*, now referred to as the symbol of Soter Megas. This occurs on all the three categories of coinage. Usually it has three prongs but some specimens have four¹⁴.

Further classification of these categories and types into numerous varieties and sub-varieties can be, and have been made¹⁵. They are based on the palaeography of legends, *tamgas*, and monograms, number of rays in the radiate halo, and such features as the headgear, drapery on the bust, identity of the object in the hand

¹¹ See G. A. PUGACHENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 20. This coin has not been taken into much consideration by most of recent writers.

¹² M. E. MASSON, *op. cit.*, p. 26. This type is not included in any other study up to my knowledge. Masson notes Hermaeus coins as a proto-type. I have not been able to examine a specimen of this type.

¹³ This may be an issue in the reign of Kujula Kadphises,

¹⁴ See for example, M. MITCHINER, *The Early Coinage of Central Asia*, Pl. XII, and *infra*...

¹⁵ The most exhaustive classification and analysis have been made by M. E. MASSON, *op. cit.* Out of the six groups and their sub-groups classified by him, it is interesting to note that he distinguished in one sub-group only, i.e. Group I, as many as six variants of palaeography, four of the *Tamga*, eleven of the number of rays in the halo, four of the type of rays, and several varieties of the objects in the hand of the king.

of the king and the facial physique¹⁶. The number and variety of dies used are obviously many and there is no doubt that a large volume of money was minted. The geography of its circulation covers the entire area from the Amu-Syr doab to the Ganga-Jamuna and their worn-out appearance vouchsafes long and continued usage¹⁷. Almost the whole bulk of this money was struck in copper (or bronze) and billon, perhaps a few in silver¹⁸. In metrology and denominations, arrangement of the type, titles, and legend it follows generally the system introduced by the Bactrian Greeks¹⁹. There is everything in

¹⁶ N. E. VUNDETSETTEL, 1927 attributed the numerous coins of the Nameless king not to one personage but at least to two or three in accordance with several known types of the face of the ruler. For this reference cf. M. E. MASSON, *op. cit.*, p. 16; he notes that Vundetsettel's paper was read at the 31st Conference of the ethnography and archaeology of the Central Asian division of the Russian Geographical society, Feb. 18, 1927, and that this paper was not published; only summary was published in the brochure of the Conference.

¹⁷ A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Sakas or the Sacae-Scythians", p. 116, "his coins are exceedingly common all over the Punjab, as well as in Kandahar, and in the Kabul valley..... as far eastward as Mathura" R. B. WHITEHEAD, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore, Vol. I; The Indo-Greek Coins*, pp. 160-61, "from Peshawar to Mathura" But M. E. MASSON's account *op. cit.*, pp. 32f. has changed and very much enlarged the geographical distribution of the coinage of this king. It is not until the sixties when other European and Indian writers took notice of this new fact (cf. D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, p. 28). The geography of this coinage now includes territories not only north of the Hindukush, and Balkh, but also north of the Oxus and even places like Tashkent and Ashkabad.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note Masson's information that Dr. Vyachestov found that coppers of Soter Megas were still circulating in the bazaars of Mazar-i-sharif to meet the shortage of local copper money in 1922. So also, Whitehead has noted that he found these coins in Delhi and Jagadhri and thought they were current there.

¹⁹ Until Masson's report there is hardly any discussion about the silver issues of Soter Megas. For example A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Sakas or the Sacae-Scythians", p. 116 notes that "the coins... are found in copper only"; P. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, 114 lists only one type in base silver; R. B. WHITEHEAD, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore, Vol. I; The Indo-Greek Coins*, pp. 160-63 does not list any silver and had remarked earlier (1913:658) that these coins are in copper only. D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-37 lists only one billon type and does not refer to silver *per se* MACDOWALL (*op. cit.*, p. 39) notes, "Soter Megas ... normally strikes denominations that are related in one way or another to the Attic weight standard that the Indo-Greeks had used in Bactria. The sole exception is the "Zeus standing right with a long sceptre" type, which follows very closely the Indian weight standard of the Pahlava billon *tetradrachms* and *drachms* from which

this coinage to indicate its independent political and economic roles. But it lacks one very essential information, i.e., the personal name of this great authority behind the mintage.

This anonymity is baffling. It is unprecedented. But this cannot but be deliberate. Either the issuer did not dare put his name or he did not need it. Anyway, this remarkable omission has encouraged speculations about the identity of this person, they can be divided into two categories²⁰: One, which regards this anonymous person as a real figure but with differing interpretation of his ethnic origin or political status. He has been considered a Greek, a Bactrian, an Indian, a Parthian, a Saka, an Indo-Scythian and a Kushan. In one case if he is identified as an active enemy of the Yuezhi-Kushan having liberated India from their yoke, in another he is treated as their humble vassal or possibly even as a member of the Kushan royalty. Second, which denies the real existence of any individual person and sees in the numerous issues the collective minting either of several rulers of one dynasty (Indian or Saka), or of a series of military rulers of local people, or viceroys of Kushan India, or of a federal association of independent character. It is not necessary to examine all the theories for some are already dead and forgotten. Others which are alive may be examined. No doubt all these theories have touched upon one or another valid aspect of this mintage. It would be useful therefore first to identify some general features and facts of this coinage:

1. These coins constitute a well unified monetary series marked by a consistency of individual signs and devices which separate them from others and announce a bold individuality that can not be missed.

2. In the selection of the types and titles, and in metrology and denomination, they seem mostly closer to the early Bactrian Greeks,

it copied the types and symbolism". I do not accept this "sole exception" for this too is not unrelated to the coinage of the Indo-Greeks, who introduced also a reduced weight standard to suit the Indian market. The Sakas and Pahlavas only followed them.

²⁰ M. E. MASSON, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

whose coins were imitated by the first Yuezhi and others in the Oxus-Jaxartes valleys²¹.

3. The major bulk of these coins are in copper and billon. There are only few in silver, but none in gold. This series, therefore, cannot be put later than the time of Wima Kadphises, who was the first among the Yuezhi-Kushans to mint gold.

4. The Greek coin-legend using both square and round cursive forms of letters indicates that no attempts were made to either modify the Greek script to suit a non-Greek language or even to a final selection of a form of it²². This would point to a period not later than Kujula Kadphises.

5. There is no sign of Roman impact on the money and its metrology. This should place this mintage before the entry of the first Roman coins in Afghanistan.

6. The titles used in the coin-legend permit no mistake about the sovereign and exalted status of the issuer.

7. The bust of the person on the obverse displays a face which is clearly different from any other known Yuezhi-Kushan (or Saka-Pahlava for that matter) ruler, and which is non-Greek in features²³.

8. The three-pronged *Tamga* used with a remarkable consistency is not found on any other Yuezhi-Kushan coinage.

9. Except Heraus no Yuezhi-Kushan used the "king on horse" motif on a coin²⁴.

²¹ I refer particularly to those which were issued in imitation of Eukratides and Heliokles. See M. MITCHNER, *The Early Coinage of Central Asia*, London, 1973; M. MITCHNER in *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage in 9 Volumes*, London, 1975-76.

²² A definite cursive form of Greek was selected by Wima Kadphises for his coins. From the time of Kanishka the important modification of *rho* (P) into *sha* (p) was made. Before Wima there is no uniformity.

²³ M. E. MASSON, *op. cit.*, p. 18 has called the face "anthropologically" non-Greek and draws attention to the large ring-shaped ear-rings which the king is clearly shown wearing on well-preserved specimens. The type of radiate bust also distinguishes Soter Megas sharply from the Indo-Greek, Saka and Pahlava kings.

²⁴ Huvishka is riding an elephant on one of his coin-types A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Kushanas or Great Yue-ti", pl. XIX.E; XXII.1; P. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, Pl. XXIX.2). No Kushan king from Kujula Kadphises onwards is shown riding a horse on coins. The only time horse appears is in association with the Iranian deity

10. The provenance of these coins was not limited to any particular region; they are found all over the territories which formed the Yuezhi-Kushan empire at its heyday.

11. These coins were minted, and probably reminted, over several decades and remained in circulation for almost two centuries if not more. They are found in deposits with the coins of kings even later than Huvishka.

Now, among the theories still current with varying strength of evidence and arguments, first there are those, which attribute the entire mintage to the time of either of the two Kadphises, or even to that of Kanishka. They would identify the issuer either with one of these kings or with one or more subordinate authorities whose names are not yet known²⁵. Then, there are others who would place this coinage between the reign of either Kujula and Wima²⁶ or that of Wima and Kanishka. Some are undecided but would not place the issuer before Kujula²⁷. Earlier I believed in identifying the authority behind this mintage with Kujula Kadphises²⁸. But now I feel convinced that he has to be placed earlier than Kujula and that, as I

Arooashpo on the coins of Kanishka and Huvishka (A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Kushanas or Great Yue-ti", Pl. XXI.2, p.108; P. GARDNER, *op. cit.*, p. 130, Pl. XXVI.7). In these cases too the deity is not riding the horse but only standing beside it.

²⁵ A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Sakas or the Sacae-Scythians", pp. 114-117, "Coins of the Kushanas or Great Yue-ti", p. 71; E. J. RAPSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 16f.; R. B. WHITEHEAD, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore, Vol. I: The Indo-Greek Coins*, p. 100; S. KONOW, *op. cit.*, p. Ixix; R. GHIRSHMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 134; J. H. MARSHALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69; B. N. PURI, *op. cit.*, p. 24; D. D. KOSAMBI, "Kanishka and the Saka Era", in PDK, pp. 124-25; G. A. PUGACHENKOVA, *op. cit.*; B. A. LITVINSKY, 1963, pp. 356-57, B. N. MUKHERJEE, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-55; BHASKAR CHATTOPADHYAYA, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-66; B. KUMAR, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁶ D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-48; J. M. ROSENFELD, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁷ J. E. van LOHUIZEN DE LEEUW, *op. cit.*, p. 375 (undecided but inclined to support Konow); R. GÖBL, "Numismatic evidence relating to the date of Kanishka", in PDK, pp. 103-13; E.V. ZEYMAL, *Kushanskaya Khronologiya (Materialy po probleme)* [The Kushana Chronology (Materials on the Problem) (in Russian)], Moscow, 1968; M. MITCHNER, *The Early Coinage of Central Asia*, London, 1973 regards this coinage as a successor of Sapadberzeo-Heraus issues but in *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage in 9 Volumes*, esp. Vol. VIII, London, 1975-76 lists some of this series as coins of Vasishka.

²⁸ A. K. NARAIN, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

show below, he is no other than the Nameless founder of the Yuezhi state of Bactria.

Fortunately it is not necessary for me to cover all the past grounds of discussion. M. E. Masson and D. W. MacDowall, who have dealt with the subject comprehensively, have provided ample evidence and arguments to reject the association of this coin-series with Wima Kadphises and his reign. Their points are automatically valid also against those who would place this coinage after Wima or identify Kanishka as the authority behind it. Pugachenkova firms up the position of Masson further. But on Masson's arguments MacDowall remarks²⁹ that "they would equally be explicable if "the nameless king", Soter Megas, was not Kujula Kadphises but his successor". This successor is not Wima Kadphises but a predecessor of him who is called "the first Kushan King to rule an extensive hegemony both north and south of the Hindukush, who built up his Indian empire by defeating the Pahlava dynasty of Gondophernes that had taken over the earlier conquests of Kujula Kadphises in the Punjab". And in doing so MacDowall restores him "to his rightful place as the Augustus, who was principal founder of the Kushana empire in India". MacDowall has very painstakingly analysed all the relevant numismatic material and has brought out much information. But I find it unnecessary to accept a new king between Kujula and Wima. There is no other evidence to vouchsafe for the existence of one, who must be provided a long period of reign, which the Soter Megas coins indicate, succeeding an octogenarian Kujula and yet make it possible for his son Wima to succeed him and reign for a considerable time.

There is nothing in the numismatic evidence which forbids placing the beginning of this mintage almost a hundred years before Kujula Kadphises and its continued usage for several generations afterwards. Studies made by Masson, Pugachenkova and MacDowall would in fact favor my hypothesis inasmuch as they would place Soter Megas earlier rather than later in time. Some of their arguments serve my hypothesis better than theirs. On the basis

²⁹ D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

of third, fourth and fifth of the eleven points of general features and facts listed above at least it is clear that (i) Soter Megas cannot be later than Wima, that (ii) his coinage provides an option to place it in a period either contemporary to, or earlier than, Kujula, and that (iii) that mintage of these coins probably took place before the entry of the first Roman coins-imitated by Kujula-in Afghanistan. Now some specific points, and a new analysis of the evidence, may be added to clinch the position.

The two main devices on the coins, "the king on horse" and "Zeus standing and holding thunderbolt" are derived from Eukratides and Heliokles, the two kings whose coins were imitated by the Yuezhi, north of the Oxus. The only other person among the Yuezhi-Kushan to use "the king on horse" was Heraus, who was earlier than Kujula Kadphises. Since Heraus has the additional feature of a "Victory" flying with a wreath, the Soter Megas type may be regarded earlier than Heraus and closer intime to Heliokles³⁰ The helmeted bust on the obverse firms up its proximity to the types of Eukratides³¹. On the other hand the coin-types of Kujula Kadphises show proximity to the types of Hermaeus and Pahlava coinages³². The conspicuous absence of any impact of Saka-Pahlava coinages in the typology must also be noted as against those on the coins of Kujula.

³⁰ The additional feature in the coins of Heraus is related to local Iranian milieu and the king-on-horse type without it, which is not only closer to the Bactrian Greek issues of Heliokles but also with the Yuezhi traditions before their accuttrating with local elements. In a way king-on-horse on these coins may be regarded as original for the Yuezhi-Kushan to be followed by others. In fact Heraus was following the tradition set by the Nameless Soter Megas rather than it was the other way round as suggested by M. E. MASSON, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³¹ The bead-and-reel border used by Soter Megas was known from the proto-types of Eukratides, Heliokles as well as the Parthian. But because of the use of crested helmet the coins of Soter Megas appear to be linked more closely to the issues of Eukratides. In this matter also Heraus should be following the Nameless Soter Megas because the former did not use the helmet of Eukratides but remained closer in style to Heliokles.

³² This is clear from the "Sterossy" coins or the so-called joint issues of Hermaeus and

Kujula as well as by the Heracles type.

The metrology and denominations follow closely the Bactrian Greek system of Attic weight standard. On the other hand as MacDowall has rightly pointed out except for the Roman lead type and its subdivisions all the coinages of Kujula seem, to have been struck to the Indian weight standard or corrupt derivatives of it. Even the reduced weight of the bilingual type of Soter Megas is in keeping with Indian issues of the Indo-Greeks. They were probably issued by, or for, Soter Megas, after the conquest of Bactria, south of the Oxus. The use of Kharoṣṭhi is no more a sure index for areas combined to the south of the Hindukush because inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhi and Brahmi are being discovered now even north of the Oxus. It is noteworthy that his so-called Mathura coins also conform to Attic weight system. MacDowall's argument that "by introducing a denomination that was metrologically related to the Attic tetradrachms and drachms, but which could nevertheless circulate alongside the existing copper and billon of the Indian standard" is well taken³³. This only shows that Wima and Kanishka followed the example of Soter Megas copper when that was being replaced by their issues.

The Greek script used on these coins does not show any attempt at modification to suit the ethnic or personal names of the Yuezhi-Kushan which one may note from the time, and in the coins, of Heraus and Kujula, and finally reformed in the coins of Wima and Kanishka³⁴. The palaeography, therefore is earlier than that of

³³ D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-41. The Statement of MacDowall that however, the only issue that Soter Megas, struck on the Indian Weight standard in desired not from any coinage of Kujula Kadphises but from the fairly long Pahlava sequence of Aspavarma, Sasan and Abdgases (p.41) is unwarranted if we go to the source of these Pahlava coins - themselves. But that Soter Megas does not follow Kujula in this respect is a point well taken.

³⁴ See for example attempts to write in Greek the personal names of Heraus and Kadphises, the ethnic name Kushan, and the titles like *Shanyu* and *Yabgu*, a problem which they did not face in the Kharoshthi coin-legends of Kujula Kadphises. Also note that both the square and round forms of Greek are used in the coins of Heraus and Kujula and that there is no uniformity. *Sha* is still represented by the Greek *Rho* written in more than one form. From the time of Wima the Greek letters acquire uniformity in favour of the cursive form and from the time of Kanishka they finally modify them to suit their linguistic needs.

Heraus and Kujula. The use of both square and round cursive forms indicate their pre-reform stage³⁵, a transitional phase. I have already shown that the old view of fixing a later date for the use of square forms of Greek letters is misleading³⁶.

The impact of Roman devices and weight system begins from the time of Kujula Kadphises and in varying degrees, forms and aspects continues in the successive coinages. Coins of "Soter Megas" and Heraus are the only two in the Yuezhi-Kushan series that do not show any Roman impact. They must be placed therefore before the time of Kujula.

The characteristic *Tamga* (symbol) used with consistency on these coins, along with its variant, neither fits in the uniform pattern of the Kushan symbols found in the coinage of Wima onwards nor does it follow that of Kujula Kadphises used rather sporadically. It seems that the use of a distinctive *Tamga* by the first Yuezhi king was an innovation. It replaced the enigmatic monograms of the Graeco-Bactrian coinage and was in conformity with the idea of independence and individuality it sought to project. The practice thus introduced was followed by Kujula, not so regularly, but which acquired a uniformity of pattern from the time of Wima Kadphises.

MacDowall's remark that "the use of a distinctive symbol on the coinages of a multiplicity of mints is not entirely the innovation of Soter Megas. It seems to be derived directly from the use of the dynastic Gondophares symbol (☤) by the Pahlava kings of the house of Gondophares, who preceded Soter Megas in the mints of Western Gandhara"³⁷ is based on the general assumption of placing Soter Megas later. But the use of Gondophares symbol on Pahlava coinage is not so regular as that on the coinage of Soter Megas. It seems that

³⁵ There is no attempt to write the non-Greek name or title on the coins of Soter Megas. Could it be that, among other reasons, because of difficulty in writing the name of the Yuezhi founder of the Bactrian state that they avoided inscribing his personal name

³⁶ A. K. NARAIN, *The Indo-Greeks*. Oxford, 1957, pp. 157-59. This rules out a late date for Soter Megas on palaeographical grounds alone. See also D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

the Pahlavas followed the practice of Soter Megas and it was not the other way round. For neither the Indo-Greeks nor the Parthians, the usual sources for Gondophares and Pahlava coinage, had the practice of using a distinctive *Tamga*³⁸.

This Pahlava context along with the fact that some Soter Megas coins were overstruck by the types of Pacores³⁹ have been used to indicate a later date for Soter Megas⁴⁰ But this is no problem because Soter Megas coinage was in circulation for a long time even after he passed away, and in wide areas; if some coins were overstruck by Pahlava kings it does not affect his earlier chronology.

MacDowall finds a "noticeable absence of any clear link in denomination or coin-types between Kujula Kadphises and Soter Megas and, having argued about "a chronological break" between the two, brings in "the coinages of the dynasty of Gondophares in the Punjab" to fill this gap, and then develops a theory of "reconquest and consolidation of the Kushan empire in N.W. India and for destruction of Taxila" by Soter Megas. He further identifies him with the king mentioned in the Panjtār, Kalawan and Taxila inscriptions of the years 122, 134 and 136⁴¹.

The question of identity of Soter Megas has been meshed up with that of the Kushan chronology, or more specifically the date of Kanishka. While some aspects of the supposed issues and solutions mentioned above may be discussed elsewhere in relevant contexts it may suffice here to state that once we agree to identify Soter Megas with the first Yuezhi king of Bactria, all such problems of accommodating him either with Kujula or Wima, or between, or after, them, disappear. In fact, by mixing the Soter Megas issues

³⁸ W. WROTH, *Catalogue of the Coins of Parthia*, London, 1903, pp. lxxvii-lxxxvii and plates. The Parthians have monograms composed of letters like those of the Indo-Greeks. Even when they use adjunct symbols they are a star and a crescent.

³⁹ A. SIMONETTA, "An Essay on the so-called Indo-Greek coinage", in *East and West*, 8 (1957), p. 53; D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, p. 46. About the reference to an overstriking of Soter Megas on a coin of Wima Kadphises G. A. PUGACHENKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 21 checked with Simonetta and found that it was not correct.

⁴⁰ A. SIMONETTA; *op. cit.*, D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*; B. N. MUKHERJEE, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ D. W. MACDOWALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-48.

with those of the later Kushan kings, and their problems of sequence and date, we are unnecessarily complicating an already complex history but ignoring solid numismatic considerations of this coinage.

There is nothing in the coinage of Soter Megas to justify its relegation to a later period. There is nothing in its monetary ethos to deny its continued minting, or reminting, and circulation, even after the death of this great king throughout the length and breadth of the Yuezhi-Kushan empire until superseded by the abundant coinage of Wima Kadphises and Kanishka. Once this logic is taken into account it is easy to explain such issues, if necessary, as the regional distribution of this coinage, the matter of overstriking by others, and the use of one or the other additional symbol, letter, or a feature.

The Kharoshthi letter *Vi* acquired significance for those who assumed in this an abbreviation for *Vima* (Wima). But Cunningham thought it could be an abbreviation for *Vikramaditya*⁴². Both may be wrong. It could be an abbreviation of a clan or family name of Soter Megas himself⁴³. It is interesting to find this abbreviation on the an epigraphic variety of Soter Megas coins as the only means of its identification probably because of the tiny size of the coin. But here again, even if this stood for Wima it would not disturb my hypothesis because then such coins of Soter Megas would be a result of continued mintings of it during the reign of Wima, *Vi* indicating its period of issue, i.e. in the time of Wima. Marshall has presumed that Wima imported the copper coinage of Kujula Kadphises in considerable bulk from Kapisa and put it into circulation at Taxila⁴⁴. But why of Kujula? Why not for that matter of Soter Megas? The occurrence of the letter *Vi* in that case could be of some meaning. Also, if the male deity on the small anepigraphic coins could be

⁴² A. CUNNINGHAM, "Coins of the Sakas or the Sacae-Scythians", pp. 114-117. He equated Vikramaditya with Barakmaris of the traditional account of the early rulers of Sindh preserved by Rashid-ud-din (H. M. ELLIOT, 1.108).

⁴³ Some scholars are tempted to find some actual connection between the name Visa from Khotan and Yü-ch'ih = Yueh Chih (dating perhaps to a period of Kushan rule in Khotan).

⁴⁴ See for example *Vasu* on the small Kushan coins of Vasudeva: R. B. WHITEHEAD, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore, Vol. I; The Indo-Greek Coins*, p. 212, Pl. XIX, p. 237).

identified with Śiva that will further this point because of Wima's affiliation to Śiva. But it must be noted that this would not affect the identity of Soter Megas with the first Yuezhi king and the original minting of coins by him.

To identify the nameless issuer of these coins with one or the other of early Kushan kings is to punish the Great Yuezhi king in a judgement by default. In spite of Fan Ye's warning that the Kushans were actually the Yuezhi for the Chinese we became so obsessed with the "Kushan" that we almost forgot their roots, the Yuezhi. Partly it was the fault of Zhang Qian that he omitted to provide the name of the first Yuezhi king of Bactria whom he had met. Partly it was also because the first scholars to deal with the subject, like Cunningham, did not allot a separate space for him in their catalogues. Apart from listing a dubious coin with the so-called symbols of Wima and Soter Megas Cunningham was taken by some superficial features common to both of them and also made the observation that, "the coins of both kings are common in the Kabul valley throughout Punjab, and in N.W. India, as far east as Banares and Ghazipur". Cunningham's observation about the provenance of Soter Megas coinage limited the scope of thinking only to areas south of the Hindukush. His association of this coinage with Wima and the Chinese statement that Yen Gao Jen destroyed Tian Ju (India) and placed there a general to control it were put together by later scholars for development of their theories. But now with sizeable discoveries of Soter Megas coinage, not only north of the Hindukush but also north of the Oxus, and its archaeological contexts, which were not known to Cunningham and many scholars until recently, perspectives have changed. Why should a *Basileus* *Soter Megas* be treated as a subordinate governor or general when examples are not wanting from numismatic and epigraphic sources that such subordinates in those days were not allowed to use such grandiloquent titles but only those of Kṣatrapa, Mahākṣatrapa, and Strategos. Attempts have been made to interpret the Greek word *Basileuon* the sense of a subordinate rank but it has rightly been shown to be wrong. Moreover the sheer volume of mintage and its wide and continued circulation would cross the

limits of any subordinate position. Also, which sovereign would permit the arrogance of these titles from an underling? The quantity of this coinage also rules out an interloper or usurper or an ephemeral king. The authority behind these coins has to be a great king in his own right. The non-Greek visage of the king and the nexus of his coinage with the Yuezhi-Kushan system are beyond question. The uniformity of the monetary system from Wima Kadphises onwards does not yield any place for this king in that sequence. The absence of Roman input and linkage with the early Bactrian Greeks as well as provenance of his coins north of the Oxus, and typological affinity with Heraus surely indicate a much earlier time than that of Kujula Kadphises and Heraus for this Nameless king. But when a tyrant or a Shanyu or Yabgu like Heraus could issue his coins with his name and title why should a King of Kings, *Basileus Basileon*, the Protector, the Great, prefer to remain "nameless"? Certainly it could not be a question of modesty because then there was no need even to vaunt the exalted titles. The mystery of this lies probably in the ideology and structure of the early Yuezhi polity on which hardly any thinking has been done. Omission of name was a deliberate act. The aura of the status of this king was greater than the name. Everybody knew him as the King of Kings, the Protector, and the Great. He was the First king of the new Yuezhi state in the West.

Once this "nameless" king of the coins is identified with the Nameless king of the Yuezhi it is possible, though not necessary, to classify the entire series of this coinage into what may be called "primary" and "secondary" issues. The "primary" ones would be the coins originally issued by this first Yuezhi king, the "*Soter Megas*", and they would consist of all those coins which have the three-pronged *Soter Megas Tamga*. The "secondary" ones would be those which were issued after him with his *Tamga* as well as those which have newer or additional symbol or symbols and the Kharoṣṭhi letter *Vi*. These "secondary" ones were probably issued by some of the Yabgus as well as by, or during the period of, Kujula and Wima Kadphises. It is possible that the type 3 with Zeus and the 6th group of M. E. Masson, if that proves not to be dubious, belong in the

"secondary" series struck during the reign of Kujula Kadphises, so also perhaps the type I with the four-pronged version of Soter Megas symbol. All the rest with the letter *Vi* along with the dubious Jani-faced coin described by Cunningham - if proved to be genuine - would belong in the reign of Wima Kadphises. I do not think any of the "secondary" series was issued by Kaniska; already there were sufficient mintage which continued to circulate even after the time of Wima Kadphises. Its circulation became gradually out of vogue with the plentiful issues of Kanislika and his successors. The variety of symbols, Kharosthi letter, and other additional features, along with the square and round forms of Greek letters might indicate different mints or a regional distribution of issues. Also, while those with square letters but with more than the *Soter Megas Tamga* may be the "secondary" issues of the time of Kujula Kadphises, or even of some of the Yabgus before him; those which have round forms of Greek and other additional features may belong to the time of Wima Kadphises.

Abbreviations

BMC *British Museum Catalogue*. CAKP.

JASB *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.

JRAS *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*

JNSI *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*.

NC *Numismatic Chronicle*.

PDK *Papers on the Date of Kaniska*, (ed. A. L. BASHAM) L., 1968.

PMC *Punjab Museum Catalogue*